SEIZE THE MOMENT DELIVER THE FUTURE

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Learning from Complaints

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Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

The Role of The Ombudsman

- Independent and impartial investigator;
- Investigates maladministration (service failure)
- Office of last resort;
- Recommends remedy for injustice and service improvement;
- One office – 3 functions: Public Services; Judicial Appointments and Local Government Ethical Standards;
- Officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

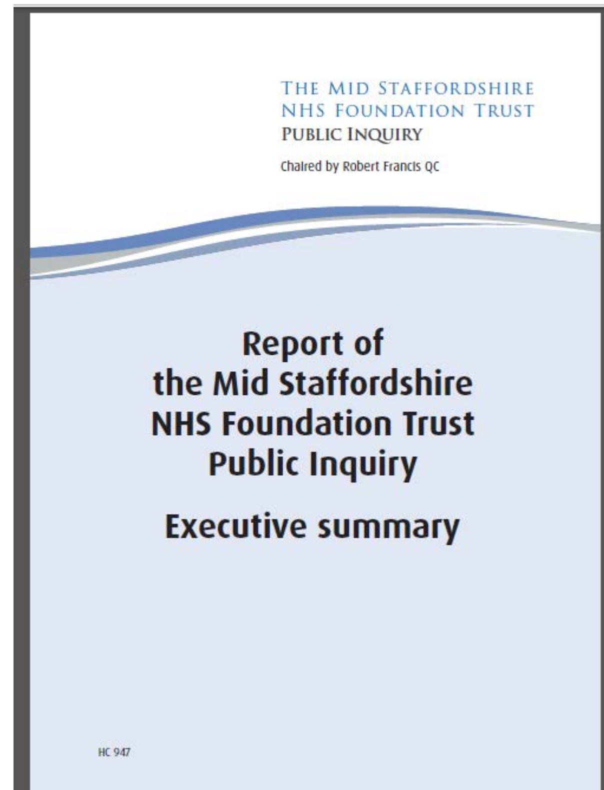
The Importance of Learning

- Service user insight is invaluable
- Complaints give the public a voice
- Failure to learn means opportunities to learn and improve services are lost
- For public services, its more serious - people are suffering injustice
- Complaints are an early warning system
- Listening strengthens public trust

Why we find it hard to learn

- We are not hearing all the voices –
- People don’t know how/who to complain and/or fear not being taken seriously (or worse).
- Defensiveness from bodies
- Staff fear blame culture
- Lack of **meaningful** complaints information
- Its too complex an environment.

‘This remote approach’



THE MID STAFFORDSHIRE
NHS FOUNDATION TRUST
PUBLIC INQUIRY

Chaired by Robert Francis QC

Report of
the Mid Staffordshire
NHS Foundation Trust
Public Inquiry

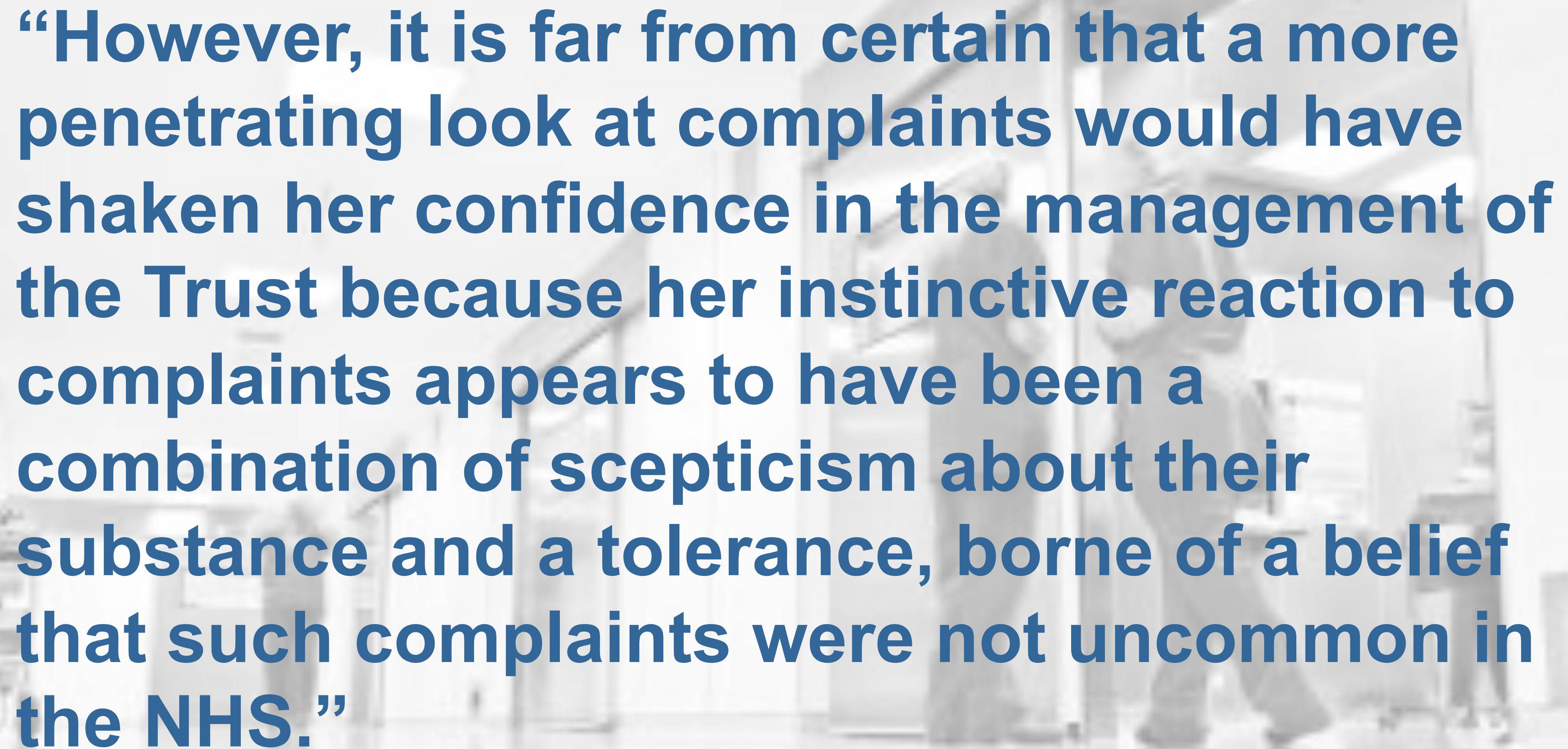
Executive summary

HC 947

The Trust Board was limited in the learning it received from complaints. In particular, it did not receive details of any individual complaints and, indeed, The Chair of the Trust, did not review any of them personally. Her reason for this remote approach was that:

> ***"As far as complaints are concerned, … individual complaints always risk giving a biased and partial view of what's happening in the trust. A complaint that's investigated properly and resolved is then put to bed and doesn't need to come to the attention of the hierarchy in the organisation, actually."***

Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, volume one, page 250



“However, it is far from certain that a more penetrating look at complaints would have shaken her confidence in the management of the Trust because her instinctive reaction to complaints appears to have been a combination of scepticism about their substance and a tolerance, borne of a belief that such complaints were not uncommon in the NHS.”

Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, volume one, page 250-251

Statistics and bar graphs aside,
how do you truly learn from
complaints?

Complaint about Complaints handling

Northern Ireland
Public Services
Ombudsman

How to investigate complaints and learn

- Give it the time it deserves -
- Speak to the complainant
- Consider each complaint in context.
- Be reflective and self-critical (individually and as an organisation)
- Assess the draft final response through the customer's eyes
- Quality assure responses

What motivates a complainant

Complainants want –

- Apology
- Acknowledgement

And, to know –

- What happened?
- Why it happened?
- How it happened?
- What can be done to stop it from happening to someone else / again?

Organisational Learning

What are we getting wrong and why?

- Record and report on all complaints
- You can’t learn from unrecorded complaints
- Root cause analysis – look beneath the surface
- Understand significant complaints, or repeating complaints
- Understand the customer story, journey - not just a case file
- The stories - key source of untapped learning

Organisational Learning

Root cause analysis

- Look deeper than the symptoms – what went wrong with underlying systems, processes, service design?
- Trace back the steps and actions, one by one
- Consider how they are related
- Discover where problem started and grew into the symptom which has arisen in the complaint (or which keeps arising)
- Human causes – people did something wrong or did not do something that was needed (no-one assessed the patient for hydration)
- Organisational causes – a system, process or policy that people use to make decisions or do their work is faulty. (change in shift rotation policy meant that no one person was responsible for patient check, everyone assumed someone else had done this)

Board "..did not listen sufficiently to its patients or its staff or ensure the correction of deficiencies brought to the Trust's attention"

Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry, volume one, page 250-251

The Role of Complaints Handlers

- **Are complaints handlers given sufficient status and weight in the organisation?**
- Are they a credible and integral part of managing and improving?
- Do they have the authority to challenge, to ascertain what happened and assess underlying reasons for failures?

The Ombudsman’s role

- Investigation of complaints from the public or body.
- Investigation of health and social care.
- Ombudsman can share her reports
- Ombudsman reporting in the public interest.
- Own initiative power (from 1 April 2018).
- Complaints Standard Authority (to be commenced).
- Apologies legislation (Northern Ireland).

Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland)(2016)

The Ombudsman's role

- Highlighting failures in care and treatment – Case Study 1
- Recommending Change - Case Study 2
- Recommending Remedy for an injustice –Case study 3

Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland)(2016)